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The procedure for conducting graduate German literary seminars at Harvard is outlined. The seminar schedule is explained in terms of the entire course and of weekly work. Such features as choice of subject for research, group discussion, oral progress reports, and presentation of seminar papers are described. The selection of seminar subject and the sequencing of seminars are also discussed. (AF)

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GRADUATE SEMINARS IN GERMAN LITERATURE: SOME PROCEDURES

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The term "seminar" has taken on a wide variety of meanings in American education in recent years. Even in German universities current conditions have resulted in "seminars" in German literature far different from those we want to discuss in this article. By "seminar" we mean a group of about a dozen graduate students examining in great detail under the guidance of a Germanist a carefully chosen, limited area of literary research. Its principal objective is the preparation by each student of a paper, roughly twenty-five pages in length, in strict accordance with the MLA Style Sheet, treating some part of the seminar subject in a scholarly and critical manner, with references to and usually quotations from other sources, and with footnote documentation. The seminar paper must also contain a selected bibliography, or when appropriate a complete one, usually of from twenty to forty titles, which will indicate that the student has consulted all the relevant compilations, including the serial bibliographies.

Each Ph.D. candidate in our department has to take at least three seminars, in order to gain practice in the techniques of scholarly research in preparation for writing a doctoral dissertation, as well as for eventual scholarly productivity. He must take a pro-seminar before becoming eligible for a seminar. The pro-seminar is designed to introduce him to the techniques of literary research and criticism, and to show him the variety of ways in which a literary problem can be approached. The pro-seminar also provides an introduction to the library, including a guided tour of its resources and explanations on how to use them.

Through the years, the authors of this article have frequently discussed seminar techniques with each other and with our colleagues. Each of us has tried various experiments in the attempt to improve efficiency and make our seminars more effective. We offer the following description of our current procedures only as an example of *Unterrichtspraxis*, in the hope that others will react by offering suggestions or criticism. Surely there can be no such thing as an "ideal" seminar, but a sharing of ideas, a pooling of resources can only be of benefit on this, the most advanced level of graduate study. Somehow, one is not inclined to associate graduate study, least of all seminars, with pedagogy. But seminars do have to be taught, and therefore there must be an *Unterrichtspraxis* just as critical as that of the more widely discussed undergraduate language courses. We hope that this article will help to stimulate further discussion of graduate level courses in general and seminars in particular.

The subject of our seminars is chosen with great care. We want the students to work on a variety of individual problems closely enough related so that each student's research has immediate interest, relevance,

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and importance to all the other seminar members. We therefore avoid the kind of subject which would, for example, have each student working with a different author, even if they are all dealing with a common problem. Such a procedure makes each student a minor authority on a writer none of the others is immediately occupied with. Reports of such investigations and final seminar papers themselves cannot then elicit the kind of close scrutiny by all the students and lively exchange of opinion and criticism which closely related problems can produce. Therefore our seminar subjects are usually a single author or a single phase or stage of an author's work, or often even a single work. When we do offer a genre or a literary movement as a subject, we do so with advanced students in mind.

Our department gives careful thought to the sequence of its seminars. The size of our graduate student body makes it possible for us to offer one seminar in the fall semester in addition to the pro-seminar and two in the spring. We try to choose a subject of investigation for one of the spring seminars which is particularly suitable for students who have just finished a pro-seminar; in other words, one which is relatively "easy." The subject of the other spring seminar would then be selected with the students in mind who have already participated in two seminars and are taking their last one. Such students would clearly be prepared to tackle a considerably more difficult subject of inquiry. Similarly we bear in mind that the one seminar in the fall will normally have no first-year graduate students, since they will all be in the pro-seminar.

For a wide variety of reasons, such gradation is not always possible, but at least we try for it. We do not rigidly subdivide the seminar students, however, as this plan might seem to suggest. All are free to choose the seminar they want. They can take a seminar given in another department if it is relevant, or skip a seminar or seminars if they are willing to extend their course work into the third year. If a "beginner" comes into an "advanced" seminar or vice versa, it is possible to assign an individual topic of investigation with this in mind. In fact, whenever we do offer the gradation of subjects we have been describing, most students are attracted by the one which is at the appropriate level. Furthermore, some mixture of beginning and advanced students is desirable. We also welcome properly prepared graduate students from related fields, especially from Comparative Literature. Occasionally we admit an unusually gifted senior.

At least a month before the beginning of the semester we post a notice on the bulletin board regularly consulted by all our graduate students, informing them precisely which works will be studied in a given seminar, and in which editions. For seminars given in the fall we try to supply this information before the end of the preceding spring semester. Sometimes the catalog entry is explicit in this regard, though usually it is not, because we often do not wish to commit ourselves so precisely so far ahead of time. The notice encourages the students to

read or reread the works before the beginning of the seminar. This is usually quite possible for them to do during the summer, in the weeks before the fall semester, or in the interval between semesters.

At the first meeting of the seminar, we introduce the subject to the students in some detail, comment on editions, chief secondary sources, special bibliographies, and other relevant matters. We do most of the talking during this first session, with the students on the receiving end, but, as will become clear in what follows, such one-way communication is confined to this first meeting. A mimeographed list of books on library reserve is distributed and commented on, and on a separate sheet, a variety (from twenty to forty) of suggested subjects for seminar papers. After we have made some comments on the topics, the students are asked to submit in writing at least one day before the next meeting a first, second, and third choice. If they would like to propose something not on the list, they are encouraged to consult us to get our approval (readily obtained unless we see difficulties the student is not aware of).

From the choices submitted during the ensuing week we prepare a final list of assigned subjects, where possible giving the students their first choices, of course, but also matching the subjects with our estimate of the students' abilities. Working back from the date of the last meeting of the seminar and assigning two papers for completion each week, we compile a list of due dates extending over the final six weeks of the semester.[1] At the beginning of the second meeting, we distribute a new mimeographed sheet which lists each meeting of the seminar (usually fifteen), and the subjects of discussion at each meeting. For the last six meetings the two papers each week are the sole content. For the weeks preceding the presentation of the seminar papers we schedule oral progress reports, sometimes two, sometimes three per week. For the early meetings before the beginning of the oral progress reports, we list subjects or works or parts of works we want the entire group to discuss. Usually it is also possible to plan some additional discussion during the period of the oral progress reports, which are ordinarily limited to fifteen minutes each.

After the weekly schedule has been thoroughly explained, and after we have made clear to the students the details of how the seminar papers are to be presented (see below), we begin discussion (in effect, the seminar begins at this point) by asking the students the reasons for their choice of seminar topics, and in general how they would expect to approach the problem. Cross-comments and suggestions by other students are encouraged here, and often provide important initial guidance and insight.

During the critical three or four weeks when all are at work on the early stages of their investigations, abbreviated seminar meetings are

[1] Some readers will know that Harvard has a reading period during the last two to three weeks of each semester. Our seminars do not observe this reading period. They meet once a week during the entire semester.

scheduled. We want the students to get a good start on their individual subjects, but we want to preserve at least weekly contact with the group. Usually we plan for one hour per week, but this often stretches out to the two full hours if the group is lively and interested. At any rate, the possible limitation of time prompts us not to plan too much joint activity while the students are beginning their own projects. During these weeks, they are encouraged to bring up any questions or problems they have encountered and would like discussed. Usually the real problems do not arise until later on, though there always seems to be at least one student who "just can't find" a book, or who has forgotten that there is such a thing as inter-library loan. Students are also invited to consult with us privately if they want advice. This they do, but not so frequently that it is at all burdensome. We sometimes call in a student for consultation if we think he could be having special difficulties. Usually there is time during the hour-or-more of the early seminar meetings for a discussion of subjects or individual works which are useful as background for most or all of the individual seminar papers.

When the oral progress reports begin, the seminar formally resumes its full two-hour sessions. Each report, if it is reasonably well prepared and delivered, is listened to with interest by the other participants. They are usually eager to know what progress the fellow student has made and are likely to want to form a judgment on the quality of the work he is doing. There is also a possibility that the listener can suggest procedures as a result of his own investigation, and—not least—he has a very real hope that he can pick up suggestions for his own research from the other man's progress report. The oral reports thus provide far more than a mere organized recital of what the reporter has been doing.

The seminar culminates in the presentation of the finished papers. The seminar papers are never read aloud. Instead, the due date for the submission of the paper is set at three days before the meeting of the seminar. Two copies must be submitted, one directly to our office, the other to the departmental library, where each member of the seminar can consult it before the seminar. Thus everyone reads the two papers completed each week. Every student is expected to read them with care, to take notes, and to be prepared to discuss them at the seminar meeting. We rarely encounter difficulty with this procedure, except for the maddening occasional failure of a student to get his paper done on time. Those who themselves are still struggling to finish their own papers usually read the others with an understandably eager interest. Those whose papers have already been presented are more relaxed readers, but perhaps all the more critical, because they do not have that gnawing concern about the fate of their own when it comes up for discussion. We give our private copy of each paper a very careful reading, of course. We often check selected footnotes in the library and in general make it clear that we really care about accurate craftsmanship. We make marginal comments for future reference, but we also prepare a sheet of

discussion points for our own use during the seminar meetings. This sheet has two lists: one contains substantive points, the other more technical matters involving style and structure. Good features as well as the opposite are listed.

Each seminar meeting begins, then, with all members having read the papers due that week. One hour is allotted for the consideration of each paper. At the start, the writer is given an opportunity for any short statement he desires to make, limited to five or ten minutes, and then the discussion is begun. We hold back our own comments as much as possible, providing guidance where we can, but permitting the students the maximum of freedom to express themselves and to air differences of opinion if they are present. Sometimes all the substantive points we have listed are brought forth by the seminar members themselves and we do not have to pursue them further. When this is not the case, we introduce toward the end those matters the consideration of which by the whole group we consider indispensable. Usually as a final step we air briefly the technical and structural points we have noted.

At their best these seminar discussions are exciting joint explorations in depth. Their intrinsic quality varies widely from hour to hour and from semester to semester, depending on the perceptiveness of the group, the quality of the seminar paper, the type of topic under discussion and our own success in guiding the discussion. But there is usually a sense of exhilaration on the part of the students which we think is an understandable result of their having for once achieved a certain expertise on a subject. It is a satisfying feeling.

There is one further step. We usually make a separate appointment with each student after his paper has been presented, and spend an hour or so with him in private, discussing aspects of his paper we felt to be important for him, but less relevant for the group as a whole. We make suggestions for possible revisions, particularly if the paper seems to be potentially publishable. But we do not ordinarily require him to revise the paper for the seminar itself. Revisions are normally called for (and are almost always needed) in the pro-seminar, but in the seminar we want the student to know that his paper is to be judged on its merits as it is originally submitted.

We hope it will be understood that this report represents a composite of our current thinking. In practice almost any of the procedures described here is subject to some modification. It is probably safe to state that neither of us has ever conducted a seminar which conforms in every detail with what has just been described. But it is a very real framework in our minds and the deviations from it at present are not great. We would be very glad, however, to hear from others in the profession and are ready to modify our current procedures to accommodate new ideas.

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